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THE  
MAN IN IRON;  
OR THE  
SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE,  
INTRODUCED BY AN  
ALLEGORY,  
FROM DAVID'S LAST WORDS,  
DELIVERED BY  
WILLIAM FRANKS.

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THE  
MAN IN IRON.

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2 SAMUEL xxiii. 6, 7. *The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron, and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burnt with fire in the same place.*

**B**RETHREN and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ; these are the last words of David, the man after God's own heart, consequently must contain things of the greatest importance to perishing sinners. *All scripture being given by the inspiration of God, is profitable.* This being written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come, must undoubtedly be worth inspection. Much gospel truth is contained in the historical and figurative parts of the Old Testament, which yields much instruction to the Lord's people, when they are enabled to search into them with a spirit of prayer, desiring to see Jesus in them. The Holy Ghost testifies, in several parts of the New Testament, that all the Old Testament scriptures testify of Christ, consequently it is our privilege to dig into those golden mines after *the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

Our all-wise Creator, foreknowing the state of ignorance and darkness that his people would be brought into by sin, has so formed and adapted the material system of things, that it serves as an image or resemblance of the spiritual or immaterial system of things. Those whose minds are enlightened by the spirit of God, and are enabled to search into the book of nature, and the book of revelation, find it so; for there is scarcely any instruction in the Bible, but by

allusion to material objects in some way or other. Hence it is, that the scripture abounds with parables, similitudes, allegories, riddles, types, visions, dreams, &c. &c.

The prophets of old, and even our blessed Lord himself, adopted this mode of instruction; for it is said, that *without a parable spake he not unto them*; and it seems to me to produce effects, by the blessing of God, which no other mode of teaching does. First, It has a tendency to excite the attention. 2dly, To impress the imagination; and, 3dly, To abide in the memory.

As I have had the pleasure, on former occasions, of addressing you, and have endeavoured to convey my thoughts to you in imagery; and, by appealing to some of you, I find that you remember truths, which otherwise you might have totally forgot; I intend, by divine permission, to persevere; for, if things delivered are not worth remembering, they are not worth speaking. If my similitudes are not just, if my pictures are not true representations of spiritual things, then it would be friendly in some of you to remind me of it; and, if they serve to confuse the mind, instead of unfolding the truths of the Bible, I wish to be convinced of it.

Permit me then, my dear brethren and sisters, (before we attend to the passage) to relate to you a short narrative, which, I think, will contain the substantial ideas of the text; and which, (though at first you may not perceive my meaning) may assist us in unfolding the same.

There was a certain woman who lived in a very low country; the land was so low that she was in danger of destruction by the floods that surrounded her, and that came in upon her; she often cast her eyes towards a *city set upon a hill*. Oh! said she, if I were but once in that city, I should be safe; she accordingly set out. She little thought of the dangers and troubles she had to pass through, for there was a large wood or forest between her and the city, and in it she had to pass *through much tribulation*. It was as full of thorns and briars, thistles, nettles, serpents, scorpions, adders, vipers, and wild beasts, &c. as it could possibly be. She had been informed, that a man in former

times, had suffered much in *opening a way through this wilderness, for the warfaring men to walk in.*

But she gave but little credit to the report; therefore she went on her own way, and that without a guide, and she had like to have experienced the truth of that proverb. *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end of that way is death:* for no sooner was she in the woods than she found herself entangled in the thickets thereof; she was by no means prepared for her journey; for, in the first place, her clothes were so thin, and being all in rags and tatters, (as we commonly say) they were like so many *cobwebs*—she might as well have been *naked*. They could not resist the pungent thorns; they consequently pierced her sides, and tore her flesh; her face was soon besmeared with blood, and some of the thorns got in her eyes, so that she could not see her way: she could not possibly move the thorns away, *for they could not be touched with her hands*, without wounding herself more deeply; to go forward, she could not; to go backward, she dare not; and the thorns had already lamed her so, that she could scarcely stand. She could expect no rest if she had laid down; for, alas! who can lie easy upon thorns? In this dreadful situation she remained, and night coming on, she expected no other than to be devoured by the wild beasts, for she heard the lion roaring in *his thicket*, Jer. iv. 10. And what increased her danger was this, there was no light in her lanthorn. However, *those who sow in tears, shall reap with joy*, and so it was with her. *Heaviness endured for a night, but joy came in the morning;* for with the dawning light, when the *day spring from on high visited her*, she observed a man, at a distance, clearing away the thorns in his approach towards her; she wondered at first, but soon discovered that he was cloathed with iron. She was not certain who he was, till he moved his helmet, and she happened to see deep scars in his temples. She immediately recollected who it was that had a *crown of thorns platted on his head*: she fell down at his feet, and worshipped him; and, like one of old, in a spirit of adoration, she said, my Lord, and my God. He, with much tenderness and love, raised her up, gave her a cordial, extracted

the thorns, healed her wounds, put shoes on her feet, (for, poor thing, she had walked barefoot before) and desired her to follow him; and, at times, *she leaned upon him coming up out of the wilderness.* He, with his iron rod, beat down all opposition, and brought her into the high way to the city. *There was no lion there, neither did he permit any ravenous beast to go up thereon.*

Now, my brethren, these are truths in imagery; truths, which I hope to make appear more evidently by explaining our text. David rejoiced with similar views when he uttered these words, (for although he does not introduce the figure of a woman, yet the security of the church is intended; it lay near his heart no doubt) and I proceed to unfold the same according to the ability God hath given me,

First, Let us consider what the thorns are.

Secondly, Who the man is that is fenced with iron.

Thirdly, His thrusting them away, and burning them; and then close the whole by some practical observations.

First, Let us consider what the thorns are. It appears to me that Belial is a word of this signification, viz. worthless, any thing of no profit, good for nothing, as thorns are, but to be burnt. We need not hesitate a moment in applying it to the devil; for the wicked sons of Eli were called children of Belial, and St. Paul intimates the same in those words: *What concord hath Christ with Belial, and what argument hath the temple of God with idols.* The italic letters introduced in our text injure it much; the words are, *of Belial all, &c.* or, as it will not alter the sense, *all of Belial, as thorns thrust away, &c.* By thorns I understand sin in all its subjects, and in all its appearances. In evil spirits, evil men, and in God's own people themselves, sins are thorns; and when sin first appeared in the moral world, thorns immediately appeared in the natural world; and as men naturally destroy thorns and thistles, so God commanded the Israelites to destroy the sinful inhabitants of Canaan; and he warns them, by saying, *all that remained among them should be as pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides.* Numb. xxxiii. 15.

When the prophet Isaiah is anticipating the glorious effects of the word to be preached in the gospel dispensation,

chap. iv. 13. he has those words: *Instead of thorns, shall come up the fir-tree; and, instead of the brier, shall come up the myrtle tree*; plainly implying that sin and sinners should be overcome; that men's hearts should be changed by miracles of divine grace. When the prophet Micah was complaining, and mourning over the aboundings of sin and iniquity, chap. vii. 4. he says, *the best of them is a brier, and the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge*. And the spouse in Canticles ii. 2. says, *his beloved among the daughters is a lily among thorns*.

Thus we see how uniform the scriptures are in their testimony; and, I think, you begin to see my meaning in the parable, and the meaning of the Holy Spirit in the text. But, to proceed, the corruptions of the Lord's own people are thorns, which will torment them more or less while in the body. It is true, according to Jer. iv. 3. that the *fallow ground* has been ploughed up, and the thorns have been cleared away, and still are subdued; yet they are not totally eradicated, nor will they till the body is changed. Anxious cares, and perplexing fears, like thorns and thistles, will spring up, and, indeed (in one sense) it is proper they should. According to Hosea ii. 6. It is by feeling the bitterness of sin we are made to value him who has power over it. The church would not have returned to her first husband if her way had not been *hedged up with thorns*; or, according to our text and parable, the church in distress highly values the Man in Iron.

It is sin, my brethren, that distresses the Lord's people; but this is our mercy, that whenever we feel the guilt of it we may be saved by looking unto Jesus; for he was called Jesus for this reason, because *he saves his people from their sins*; not from the being of it here, but from the power and love of it. I think St. Paul is a witness for us here, 2 Cor. xii. 7. He had a *thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure*. By this last expression there is no doubt but this thorn was a violent temptation to sin in some way or other, which was most adapted to humble him in the dust. I cannot find, in the scripture, that pains of body, or afflictions of any kind, are compared to thorns. It was feeling sin

within him that caused him to say, *I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.* All this evidence summed up, I think, amounts to this, that believers are, in a world, infested with evil spirits, full of sinful men, and a body of sin remaining about them. All these thorns and briers oppose them, and perplex them, while travelling through this wilderness.

We proceed to the second thing proposed, which was, to shew who this man fenced with iron is, who not only had power to touch the thorns and thrust them away, but will utterly burn them all with fire. Indeed, it is already proved, if we admit the thorns to be Satan, sin, and sinners, we know who hath *put away sin by the sacrifice himself*, and who will punish Satan, and all his followers, *with unquenchable fire.*

However, the image in our text is worth notice, particularly by those who love to see their beloved in all his characters in which he acts in their defence. Let us then look at him a little, my brethren, as the man cloathed in iron, fortified and prepared to remove all our enemies out of the way. It most undoubtedly alludes to the manner of warriors, dressed in coats of mail; and we find throughout the scriptures, that iron conveys the idea of strength, as of this metal weapons of war, offensive and defensive, were made. In Daniel ii. 42. iron signifies strength. Likewise, in Judges iv. 3. Jud. i. 19. Jer. xxviii. 14. Those, and many other places show the same, and the Lord reminding his people of their great deliverance, he tells them, he *brought them out of the iron furnace.*

If then, by iron, we understand power and strength, this Man in Iron must be the man who is stronger than the strong man armed, who keepeth his goods in peace until a stronger than he cometh and overpowereth him: it is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, in one person; who, though he suffered as man more than we can conceive, when he opened a way for sinners; yet, by the power of his divinity, he overcame, and is now exalted, and has command over the whole world or forest. He is possessed of *all power in heaven and earth, and he hath all things put under his feet.*

O my fellow sinners, this is good news, glad tidings of great joy; if you ever was, or if any of us are in the situation the church was described to be in the parable, we cannot do better than to apply to him. O let us call upon him! he is a God at hand, and not a God afar off; had she called upon him sooner, she need not have suffered so long; you may recollect she did not cry out, and some of you, probably, do not cry heartily.

O that the Lord, the spirit, would shew you, that *there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved!* He, as it were, stands behind the thickets, waiting to be gracious, and you must be brought to submit to him. You may think you can remove or overcome your temptations or sins, but you cannot; and by attempting it, you find that thrusting the thorns away by your own strength, they will spring back with tenfold violence, and cut you more severely for your folly. You are weak, but he is Mighty, Almighty, being in his divine nature **JEHOVAH.** *Trust in him, for in him there is everlasting strength.*

We find in the scriptures, that a staff, or rod, is the exercise of his power over his enemies; as it is said of him in the second Psalm, that he should *break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* According to 1 Samuel xvii. 7. the spears of warriors were of iron. There is no doubt but this staff in our text was iron. In the book of the Revelation, by St. John, xii. 5. we read of a *man child who was caught up unto God and his throne, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron.* I do not intend now to explain the context, but I firmly believe that this is the same person described in our text; that he governs all things in this lower world; that all the commotions and revolutions, &c. now taking place, or that may take place among the nations, are all the effects of his unerring wisdom, and under his immediate controul; and he is, probably, (in this sense) thrusting away the thorns of superstition, to make room for the good seed of his word.

We proceed, in the third place, to shew, how he thrusts

away the thorns, and burns them in the place. The word *same* is in italic letters, and perverts the meaning they shall be utterly burnt with fire in the place. What place? It appears to me to be the place that Judas is gone to. Acts i. 25. Isaiah xxx. 32, 33. *Even Tophet ordained, of old; for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it; this is the lake of fire and brimstone, where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.* The Lord Jesus, as a warrior, challengeth his enemies, in Isaiah xxvii. 4. *Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle: I would go through them: I would burn them altogether;* and laying aside figures, we have many express declarations, that all unbelievers and impenitent sinners shall be as fuel for the fire of the wrath of God for ever and ever, for *our God is a consuming fire.* That sinners should ever think of escaping out of the bottomless pit, is the delusion of Belial to get them in more easily; for, as it has no bottom, they will be falling deeper and deeper to all eternity; and Satan knows very well, that this strong Man in Iron has got the KEYS OF HELL, and *when he shuts, none can open, and he declares, the fire of that place is unquenchable.* According to our text then, *all of Belial are thrust away, and they shall all be utterly burnt with fire in the place.*

Thus, my brethren, I have endeavoured to lay open before you the last words of David. It only remains for us to make some observations upon what has been said, by way of further improving the subject.

First, I would remark, it is the privilege of sinners, living and dying, to look unto Jesus, and to be happy; to believe in Jesus, and to be saved. I repeat the word sinners, because I believe there are many precious souls remaining in bondage, perplexed with thorns of sin; through a mistake on this point, they do not see their interest in Christ; they do not know that Christ died particularly for them, &c. Why do they not know it?

Is not this *a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,*

*even the chief of sinners?* Are not the invitations of the gospel free, *whosoever will, let him come?* Is not this the record God has given of his Son, *that in him is eternal life?* If you say you believe these things, at the same time you do not enjoy salvation, you contradict yourself, for you say you believe you are a sinner, and you say you believe Christ died for sinners, and whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out; and yet you cannot believe he died for you, though you do come to him (for believing is coming to him.) If this is not a contradiction I know not what is. The fact is this, your own heart deceives you, for you do not believe.

You not only contradict yourself, but you contradict God; for he, in many places, says to this effect, *that if thou believest in thine heart, that God raised up Jesus from the dead, thou shalt be delivered or saved.* You say, I do believe, and yet I am not delivered. Is not this giving God the lie? You, perhaps, are putting this deliverance or salvation at a distance, saying, you believe now, and salvation will come at some future period; but you cannot tell me when, where, why, nor how. You err, my brethren, not knowing the scriptures, for they uniformly testify, *that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* You will find, if you search, that salvation is generally mentioned in the present tense, and sometimes in the past and future: for instance, Eph. ii. 5, 8. *By grace are ye saved; by grace ye are saved through faith, &c.* so that, separating faith and salvation is evidently a trick of Belial and his agents, who endeavour to keep the soul among the briars.

He is very artful in this business; he can and he does misrepresent the most glorious truths in the Bible: for instance, he will pervert and misrepresent the soul-reviving truths of the election of God's people *in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, of predestination to the adoption of children*, the absolute sovereignty of God in the redemption of the church, &c. &c. he sets men upon reasoning on these subjects; and, while they remain in a dark state of mind, they can neither understand them nor enjoy them; his aim is in these, and in all temptations, if pos-

sible, to keep souls from listening to those things which demand their first attention, viz. the invitations of the gospel to *lost* sinners as such.

David credited the truth of God in the verse preceding the text, and he was happy he was saved in so doing, though appearances made against him. *Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

Pray observe the word *all*; *all my salvation, all my desire*. He was perfectly satisfied; he wanted nothing more. David was a sinner; he had been a vile sinner; he was *saved by grace through faith, that not of himself, it was the gift of God, not of works*, consequently he had nothing to boast of; no, my brethren, he had nothing to recommend him any more than you and I have, and, in one sense, not so much—for as he was so highly favoured and eminently distinguished by God, he must, consequently, be the deeper in debt; and this is a poor recommendation for future favours.

All then is of grace, sovereign grace. To bring this matter to a point then, let us ask these questions respecting a soul in bondage seeking for deliverance. Does the gospel bring glad tidings, or does it not? Does it reach his case, or does it not? Is it an address to lost sinners, or is it not? Is it his right, on the testimony of God alone to believe, or is it not? If it is not, then there is no hope; but if it is, then it is nothing but the accursed sin of unbelief that separates between thy soul and Christ. I know very well this is a point on which the generality of men oppose the general tenor of God's word, and there are ten thousand schemes which have a tendency to keep a sinner in his sins. God and man do not think and speak alike upon this subject; both parties cannot be true; and I am inclined to think (with Paul) *that God is true, and every man is a liar*.

Secondly, I would observe, David seems to enjoy the thoughts contained in the text. After expressing his own security and happiness, he seems to reflect on the situation of the church of Christ; he considered her enemies powerful,

numerous, crafty, &c. but he did not stagger through unbelief; *he was strong in faith, giving glory to God.* All of Belial, as thorns thrust away, observe, *shall be* is in italic letters; it is in the present tense; he not only believed that they should be thrust away from the church in all ages, but he experienced the truth of it in his own soul. He found, (O happy David!) that all the powers of darkness united could not hurt him. He had been tormented with the thorns of this wilderness, perhaps, as much as any man; but now through faith in Jesus, he overcame; he is now *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.* No wonder he describes the Captain of our Salvation in this way. The Holy Spirit led his soul to Jesus; and, having this view of him, he draws the picture; and the believer now, though he is in the midst of thorns, looks to the same object; he sees him possessed of infinite power, impenetrable iron: he experiences deliverance by his arm, and rejoices in him from day to day; *he leans upon his beloved coming up out of this wilderness—finds perfect peace, having his mind stayed upon him.* He sees it his right (on the testimony of God) to trust in the Lord for ever, and in Jehovah he finds everlasting strength.

O my friends! this is happy living; this is happy dying; *for living or dying we are the Lord's;* it is absolutely unspeakable and full of glory.

Thirdly, Let us consider how came the way to be open through this thorny wilderness. Our Deliverer had engaged, before the foundation of the world, to ransom, to redeem his chosen out of the hands of the enemy; and, in the fulness of time, he actually came into the thorns and briers, and he was most cruelly mangled by them. It is said, his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. His sacred head was pierced with sharp thorns of our sins. *He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.* He was the ram caught in the thicket, which Abraham was pointed to, and sinners are pointed to him in the preaching of the gospel. *Behold the Lamb of God*

*that taketh away the sin of the world.* Perhaps I may be addressing some who do not understand these things, and speak evil of things which they understand not.

This is not to be wondered at; it is rather a proof of the truth of the scriptures, that man, by nature, is dead in trespasses and sins. We know that all men are in the midst of these thorns and briers, and yet many feel them not. If you were to thrust a thorn deep into my leg, and I did not cry out, you would think it a proof to demonstration, that my limb was mortified. I think the same of that person who is full of sin and feels it not; the cause of such is deplorable beyond description, for they will be brought to their feeling when perhaps it will be too late; for, as Manassah was caught among thorns, and the enemies of God, under the hands of Gideon, were torn to death with thorns, so will the sins of the finally impenitent torment them to eternity. St. Paul tells us, that *the earth which drinketh in rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth nothing but thorns and briers, is rejected: it is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* How dreadful then is the state of the unconcerned sinner! We can only lament over him, tell him the truth, and pray for him; but we, nor angels, cannot give life.

Power belongeth unto God: O believer! rejoice in the glorious object set before thee in the text. A man clothed in power, *mighty in battle, mighty to save, the mighty God, Jehovah the Saviour, thy Saviour.* O believer! he has conquered all thine enemies for thee, he will conquer in thee, and bring thee off the field of battle more than a conqueror. It is true thou art in the midst of thorns; but if thou understandest this matter as clear as David did, thou wilt say, in the present tense, they are thrust away; thou feelest thorns within thee, and thou canst not pull them out thyself; thou findest thorns in thy family which thou canst not remove; thou meetest with thorns in thy business which cannot be touched with hands; thorns in the world every step thou takest; thou hast need of thy iron shoes: go where thou wilt, and do what thou canst, thorns and briers compass thee around. Well, be it so, even in the midst of them

rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice—rejoice thus.

O my precious Redeemer! thou art my deliverer; the guilt of sin is removed out of my conscience by thy precious blood; the love of it is taken out of my heart; my soul is happy in thy love; I triumph in thy salvation; who can lay any thing to my charge? Thou hast died; thou hast rose from the dead; thou diest no more; death hath no more dominion over thee; thou livest; thou reignest triumphingly over all thine enemies, all mine enemies; thou art the resurrection and the life; thou ever livest; and because thou livest I shall live also. Lord, thou hast said it; I believe it; I rejoice in it, and can set to my seal, *thou art true*. O my brethren, believers in Jesus Christ! *who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, (as it is written for thy sake, we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter) nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

O let us think on, and believe in the wonderful love of our Three-One Covenant God!—The Father so loved us, that he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all: the Son so loved us, that though *we were enemies* to him, he died for us: the Spirit so loved us, that he hath *made us willing* to be reconciled to God on his own terms: he continues to *take of the things of Christ, and shews them unto us*. We are kept, and shall be kept by *his power* through faith unto everlasting salvation. Then let us sing hallelujah, and glory, praise, honour, and power be ascribed to Jehovah, for ever and ever, for he hath *delivered us from the wrath to come*.

To conclude. Solomon says, Prov. i. 5, 6. *A wise man will bear, and will increase in learning; he will understand a proverb, and the interpretation thereof; the words of the*

*wise and their dark sayings.* This text might appear a dark saying to many of you. As it was dictated by infinite wisdom, it must be numbered amongst the words of the wise, and I have endeavoured to explain it, and to improve it, *not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth.*

I leave these imperfect hints with him as the sower leaves his seed, intirely depending on the blessing of Heaven.— I pray him to forgive all errors, and to cause his truth to take deep root in the hearts of his own people, to spring up and to bring forth fruit, *to the praise of the glory of his own grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

THE END.

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